

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

WASHINGTON STATE CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12 STUDENT HANDOUT, LESSON 3

THEME: DIMPLED BALLOTS, HANGING CHADS AND REFORM

Events in the last decade have pointed to the fundamental need for election reform in our nation. The policy of the state of Washington is to encourage every eligible person to register to vote and to participate fully in all elections and to protect the integrity of the electoral process by providing equal access to the process while guarding against discrimination and fraud. You need to feel confident that your adult leaders are trying to learn from mistakes by making improvements in the election system. You need to feel that steps are being taken to enhance the reliability and credibility of voting results.

ACTIVITY:

Below is a list of the reforms that have occurred in the Washington State election system. Examine the list of reforms closely, and then respond to the questions that follow.

Reform List:

1. The Legislature paved the way for creation of a statewide voter-registration database that will prevent fraud.
2. New rules have been adopted to:
 - help determine voter intent on questionable ballots,
 - determine how ballots must be counted when voter intent is questioned,
 - define a "valid" punch-card vote,
 - determine how damaged absentee ballots must be handled statewide, and
 - determine how special ballots and physically damaged ballots must be handled.
3. The State Legislature has adopted election reform measures including the Voting Integrity Act, which:
 - ensures that people registering to vote are fully aware of the requirement to be a U.S. citizen,
 - provides a vehicle for voters to report fraud, and
 - gives prosecutors authority to take action against offenders.

There are many possible answers to the questions below, so be sure to support your opinions with the reasoning you used.

Questions:

1. Which changes do you think are a response to the problems that occurred in the year 2000 presidential election?
2. What potential voting fraud might be prevented by reform number one?
3. Why is number two trying to establish pre-determined procedures?
4. What abuse is the Voting Integrity Act trying to prevent?
5. How could the database mentioned in reform number one help prevent fraud? How could it concurrently provide a service to voters?
6. Which reform do you think is most critical to improve the system's credibility; i.e., to ensure voter confidence in the system?
7. Which reform do you think is most likely to improve the system's reliability; i.e., to ensure that the results of an election accurately reflect the will of the voters?

Bonus question:

Is there a reform you would like to see enacted that is not listed in the reforms listed above? What is it? Why do you think we need it? Would it be aimed at the credibility or the reliability of the election system?

Don't stop here! Maybe your idea needs to be transmitted to your state officials? You might consider writing a letter expressing your views on election reforms to the Secretary of State (www.secstate.wa.gov), your district's State Legislators (www.leg.wa.gov) or U.S. Congressional member (you can link from the Secretary of State site). This could be in support or opposition to one of those listed on your activity sheet or it could be your original suggestion for a reform not listed.